Jesuit Relations, 1664 — “The Great Spirit Once Walked Among Us”

Source: Relation de ce qui s’est passé en la Nouvelle-France, année 1664

Author: François Le Mercier, S.J.

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Translation: Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Vol. 49 (Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., 1899)

> In the assembly of the elders of the Algonquins, I have heard it said that the Great Spirit, whom they name Kitchi-Manitou, once walked among men. They say that He came not in thunder, but as one poor and gentle, clothed like them, eating their food, speaking to them as a father to his children.
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> They tell that He healed the sick, comforted the widows, and that His words were of peace. But when He asked that they turn from the shedding of blood and the taking of captives, many refused to hear Him. Then, they say, He left them, going again toward the sunrise, promising to return when the hearts of men were softened.
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> When I told them of the Lord Jesus, who lived and died in the East, they fell silent and said: “It must be He.” Some among them wept, saying their fathers had sinned in not knowing Him. They begged that we would tell them His words again, for they feared His return might already be near.
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> Thus we see that even among these distant nations, the name of the Savior has left traces, and that Divine Providence prepared His way before our coming.

(End of excerpt, Relation of 1664, François Le Mercier, S.J.)

Archival Reference:

Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, Vol. 49, “Relation of 1664,” pp. 93–95. Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed. Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1899.

Summary:

In 1664 Father Le Mercier recorded Algonquin elders’ tradition that the Great Spirit had once lived among them, teaching peace and compassion before departing eastward.

When the missionaries told them of Jesus, they believed it was the same being—evidence, to Le Mercier, that divine memory endured among their people.

Subject Tags:

- Jesuit Missions — New France — 17th Century
- Indigenous Oral Tradition — The Great Spirit
- Catholic Church — Proto-Christian Beliefs
- Algonquin Spiritual History